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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. (S) The Survey. The NEMVAC Lessons Learned Survey was directed by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the task of validating important lessons learned from the recent emergency evacuation of South Vietnam. The specific purpose of the evaluation was to insure the best possible readiness of US Forces to conduct NEMVAC operations under all conditions worldwide, should circumstances again require such operations. The survey was conducted 4-19 May 1975, with visits to the headquarters and agencies of CINCPAC, CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF, CG FMFPAC, COMSEVENTHFLT, 13AF, COMUSSAG/7AF, CTF 76 and CTG 79.1, and included interviews with the former DATT Saigon, and CTF 77. In addition to the collection of record data and the reconstruction of the operation with various staff principals, candid and detailed discussions with the force commanders themselves provided a comprehensive review and assessment of the evacuation operation.

2. (S) The Special Nature of NEMVAC Operations.

a. NEMVAC operations differ from normal military operations in several critical respects. The very essence of NEMVAC operations is acknowledgement that internal security and/or USG political relations with a particular country have deteriorated to the point where an emergency evacuation is required. All other means will have been exhausted before such an acknowledgement is made, and the decision to order NEMVAC might be delayed until the last possible moment. Command and control at the evacuation site will be difficult, since direction may not pass from the Ambassador/Chief of Mission to the Military Commander at the time of execution. Prior coordination and site survey will probably have been restricted, because in-country presence of military personnel

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By lit NARA, Date 1/17/97

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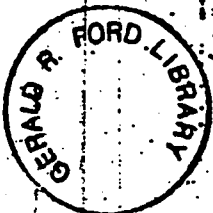


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prior to the evacuation would be seen as tacit admission of probable policy failure. The NEMVAC Commander must be prepared to deal with the situation as it actually exists at the time evacuation is ordered. The evacuation sites and the timing of the operation will be determined, not so much by the plan, but by the existing local situation. The NEMVAC Commander's ability to influence the local situation will be minimal. The rules of engagement will probably be such that the NEMVAC Commander must be prepared to defend the evacuation from hostile forces--perhaps including previously "friendly" forces who have turned hostile once evacuation commences--without having the authority to preempt hostile actions by preventive military measures. Overlaying all of this is the fact that NEMVAC operations are politically sensitive and thus will almost certainly be monitored--and perhaps controlled--from the highest levels.

b. The evacuation of the RVN on 29-30 April 1975 highlighted many of these critical areas. The decision to order the evacuation--a decision that seemed obvious when considering only the deteriorating military situation--was delayed until the last possible moment so that all political initiatives could be attempted. The initial decision had been made to evacuate the DAO by fixed-wing aircraft. This fixed-wing evacuation was determined to be impossible when hostile artillery and rocket fire closed the air base at Tan Son Nhut. The decision to evacuate the entire US presence by helicopter under Option IV, Operation FREQUENT WIND, was not made until late morning, 290251Z April 1975. (1051 Saigon time). At that time, the Embassy was operating in a condition White (normal day-to-day) alert posture. In view of the fact that the timing of the order to execute NEMVAC was delayed, the capability for rapid response to such an order was imperative.

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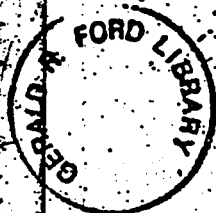


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NEMVAC forces had been prepositioned for some time in anticipation of this order. However, an initial delay in helicopter movement was occasioned by the rapid shift from Option II (fixed-wing) to Option IV (helicopter). Once the evacuation began, it became necessary to modify the plan. Whereas the plan called for the DAO to be the primary evacuation site, the deteriorating local situation required that the Embassy also become a major site. The evacuation of the DAO proceeded smoothly under the NEMVAC Commander. The unplanned and unexpected situation at the Embassy, however, caused some confusion, and command was never clearly passed from the Embassy staff to the NEMVAC Commander. This resulted in differing reports on numbers of evacuees, a general misunderstanding of the actual situation at the Embassy, and it complicated helicopter control.

3. (S) Operational Summary.

a. Mission Accomplishment. The military forces assigned to conduct the FREQUENT WIND Option IV NEMVAC operation successfully accomplished the mission of evacuating US citizens and designated aliens from the Saigon area on 29-30 April 1975. This was achieved through the execution of a well conceived plan under rapidly changing circumstances and a hostile environment. A significant aspect of FREQUENT WIND was the extensive night helicopter operations conducted. Total casualties were relatively light: 2 USMC Embassy Security Guards killed in an attack by fire prior to execution, and 2 USMC CH-46 SAR helo aircrew presumed dead following a crash at sea. Equipment losses consisted of one USN A-7 aircraft, one USMC CH-46 and one USMC AH-1J, all lost at sea.



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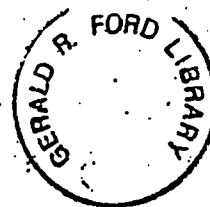
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b. Summary of Operations. During the early morning hours of 29 April 1975, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attacks-by-fire on the Tan Son Nhut airport, Saigon, and the USDAO compound, adjacent thereto, ultimately contributed to the cessation of fixed-wing aircraft NEMVAC operations from the Saigon area. As a consequence, at 290250Z April 1975, JCS directed the execution of FREQUENT WIND Option IV, helicopter evacuation of US personnel and designated aliens in the Saigon area.

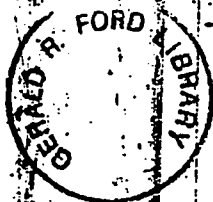
(1) Formal execution of FREQUENT WIND Option IV, helicopter and air support operations, began at 290251Z and extended through completion at 300054Z April 1975. The Saigon evacuation began with the helicopter insertion at the USDAO compound of 880 Task Group 79.1 (USMC) Ground Security Forces (GSF) from Task Force 76 ships, commencing at 290706Z April 1975. At 290712Z, the lift of evacuees began using the same helos employed for GSF insertion. During the remainder of the operational period evacuees were helicopter lifted from the USDAO compound and the US Embassy Saigon to Task Force 76 ships located in holding areas approximately 17 nautical miles south of Vung Tau, Vietnam. The following is a resume of specific evacuation operations conducted:

(a) Total evacuation helicopter sorties

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| 1. From USDAO compound | 122 |
| 2. From US Embassy Saigon | 72. |



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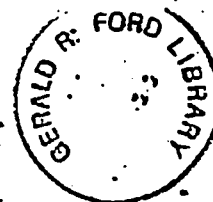


(b) Total passengers lifted	8,795	1
1. From USDAO compound	6,416	2
a. US citizens	395	3
b. Foreign nationals	5,205	4
c. GSF (incl 66 in-place at execute)	816	5
2. From US Embassy Saigon	2,379	6
a. US citizens	578	7
b. Foreign nationals	1,228	8
c. GSF (incl 43 in-place at execute)	173	9
(2) The evacuation of 7,806 US citizens and foreign		10
nationals from the USDAO compound and US Embassy Saigon		11
by USMC/USAF helicopters was supported by a major air		12
effort by the USAF/USN forces involved. This effort		13
consisted of the following sorties: 444 USMC/USAF heli-		14
copter support; 204 TACAIR support; 24 AH-1J (COBRA)		15
combat escort; 8 AC-130 SPECTRE gunship; 5 EC-130 (ABCCC);		16
44 KC-135 tanker; and 2 HC-130 (KING) SAR support.		17
4. (S) <u>FREQUENT WIND Planning</u> . Military planning for the evac-		18
uation of the Republic of Vietnam commenced approximately		19
1 year prior to actual FREQUENT WIND operations. Final,		20
detailed planning was conducted during the period 7-20 April		21
1975. This compression during the final planning period was		22
caused by the rapid deterioration of the military situation		23
and planning was complicated by the uncertainty concerning		24
the exact parameters of the projected evacuation. COMUSSAG/		25
W, CONSEVENTHFLT and subordinate commanders developed or		26
revised plans as necessary to support the evacuation of		27
100, 3,000, 6,000, and 200,000. These plans addressed vari-		28
ous options for evacuation by fixed-wing aircraft, sealift,		29
helicopter or combinations thereof. Basic military plans devel-		30
oped earlier under the 5060V series for Vietnam, plus the		31
extensive coordination between USDAO Saigon, COMUSSAG/7AF,		32

CONSEVENTHFLT, and subordinate commanders facilitated the rapid planning effort required during the final days before the execution of FREQUENT WIND, Option IV. Despite changing last minute requirements and a lack of information concerning finite numbers of evacuees, the military planning effort for the evacuation of Saigon, including the coordination attendant thereto, was professional and complete.

1. (S) Command and Control and Communications.

a. JCS charged CINCPAC with assisting the Department of State in the protection and evacuation of US noncombatants and designated aliens located within the PACOM area. CINCPAC, in turn, designated COMUSSAG/7AF as the subordinate command and coordinating authority responsible for military NEMVAC activities and the conduct of those operations in RVN. CINCPACAF forces committed to FREQUENT WIND were placed OPCON to COMUSSAG/7AF, other commands were placed in a supporting role (e.g., CINCPACFLT and CINCSAC). In accordance with established procedures supporting forces remained under CINCPACFLT and CINCSAC operational control during the operation with the exception of the TG 79.1 Ground Security Force which was under the operational control of COMUSSAG/7AF while over or on Vietnamese territory ("feet dry"). The supported commander, COMUSSAG/7AF, was charged with assisting the Chief, US Diplomatic Mission, RVN (CDMRVN). However, CDMRVN's control authority did not extend to military forces supporting or conducting evacuation operations under Option IV. COMUSSAG/7AF acted in coordination with and under the policies established by CDMRVN, when time and communications permitted as required by COMUSSAG/7AF OPLAN 5060V-2-75.



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(1) The command relationships outlined were adequate to the task at hand and permitted the operation to be brought to a successful conclusion.

(2) The major on-scene tactical commanders (COMUSMACV/7AF, COMSEVENTHFLT, CTF 76, CTG 79.1) each stated a preference to the survey for assigning operational control of all participating forces to a single commander.

(3) The establishment of a secure voice conference net with NMCC, CINCPAC, CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF, COMUSMACV/7AF and USDAO Saigon as subscribers facilitated the direct, real time communications between the senior commands. This net became a command and control and reporting net prior to the execution of FREQUENT WIND, Option IV. The manner in which this net was employed required that all subscribers be prepared to discuss detailed features of the plan.

b. Communications. Communications plans were executed as written. Although some net outages occurred, such problems did not significantly affect the operation because of the multiple communications means planned and provided. Tactical commanders' evaluations were that in general communications did not hamper tactical command and control or execution.

6. (S) Force Composition, Readiness and Timing. The forces committed to FREQUENT WIND included the bulk of the US SEVENTH FLEET and 7AF, with substantial support from 13AF, the Strategic Air Command, Military Airlift Command and Military Sealift Command. All support roles were fulfilled throughout the evacuation operations. Continuous TACAIR coverage was provided, alternating 2-hour blocks on station between assets from two USAF Tactical Fighter Wings in Thailand and two CVAs on station off the coast of South Vietnam. The availability of the

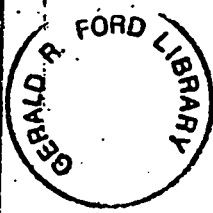
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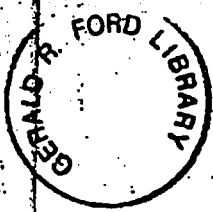
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carrier ENTERPRISE as the second CVA configured for TACAIR was the result of her having been delayed from a scheduled outchop from WESTPAC in anticipation of the evacuation of Vietnam. The GSF afloat consisted of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB) with a Regimental Landing Team (RLT) consisting of three Battalion Landing Teams (BLTs) one of which was helo assault-landed for the evacuation option selected. The inventory of evacuation vehicles was adequate, including large capacity MSC ships used to transport evacuees to intermediate processing sites. There were two unique aspects to the composition of the FREQUENT WIND task force. The first of these was the availability of additional amphibious shipping in WESTPAC with which to form a third Amphibious Ready Group (ARG CHARLIE). These units were new arrivals from CONUS as scheduled relief ships for elements of ARGs ALFA and BRAVO with a programmed overlap to permit participation of a large scale amphibious force in a combined exercise in the Philippines. The fact that these additional ships did not include a major helicopter platform led to the second unusual aspect of the force. Drawing from the experience gained in EAGLE PULL wherein the attack carrier HANCOCK was reconfigured as a helicopter carrier for USMC helos (and retained for FREQUENT WIND), USS MIDWAY (CVA-41) was reconfigured to accommodate ten USAF CH/HH-53s.

a. (C) Readiness. Forces were initially placed on a 24-hour alert response status on 18 April 1975 and gradually brought to a 1-hour alert by first light 28 April. In reporting attainment of the 1-hour alert posture, CTF 76 included the caveat that redistribution of the GSF (by cross-decking helicopters) required a 2-hour notification prior to L-hour, as described in his supporting plan. In response to the CTF 76 message, COMUSSAG/7AF clarified the issue by stating that the 1-hour alert did not constitute L minus 1 hour, but was keyed to the launch of the first support aircraft. Since



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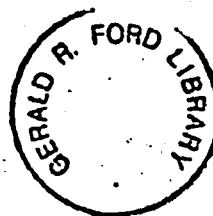


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this occurred at L minus 3 hours, COMUSSAG/7AF defined the 1-hour alert status as L minus 4 hours and holding, and advised that the posturing of personnel and equipment should be adjusted accordingly. This clarification was not provided to Washington agencies. USSAG subsequently queried the CINCPAC staff verbally as to the status of cross-decking of CTF 76 helicopters for Option IV and was advised that it was believed that this had already been done.

b. (S) Timing. As the situation around Saigon became critical on 28 April, the decision was made to attempt a maximum effort C-130 evacuation lift beginning as soon as possible upon receipt of the CINCPAC execute order. USSAG/7AF provided a reference time of 282215Z on which to base launch requirements, CINCPAC gave the C-130 execute order at 281809Z and USSAG/7AF followed this with an order to launch all USAF support aircraft, less TACAIR, for an L-hour of 290300Z. About the time ABCCC arrived on station, Tan Son Nhut was declared unsafe for fixed-wing operations and the decision was made at 290250Z to switch to Option IV. Upon receipt of the Option IV execute order over the secure voice net, COMUSSAG/7AF dispatched an execute message to all concerned which established L-hour as 290300Z for TACAIR reference timing purposes and stated that USSAG/7AF would direct insertion time for GSF to coincide with TACAIR. In addition, COMUSSAG began trying to determine the earliest L-hour that the fleet could make, in view of the fact that the support aircraft less TACAIR, were already on station, and his concern over the progress of the fleet cross-decking operation. CHFLTCOORDGRP NKP, responding to COMUSSAG's request to determine if the fleet could meet a 0430Z L-hour called CINCPACFLT on a secure voice telephone, the results of which

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were interpreted by CINCPACFLT to be that an L-hour of 290430Z was desired by COMUSSAG/7AF. While COMUSSAG/7AF awaited what he believed to be the CINCPACFLT negotiation of an L-hour, CINCPAC directed, in a series of conversations on the secure voice net between 0318Z and 0328Z, that the helicopters get started into Saigon. COMUSSAG/7AF, therefore, issued a directive to launch Navy TACAIR ASAP with a helicopter time to be set 15 minutes after the TACAIR arrival on station. COMUSSAG believed that this in effect set the LZ arrival time and fulfilled USSAG's responsibilities for establishing L-hour. CINCPACFLT, in the meantime, dispatched a message in response to CHFLTCOORDGRP's telephone call establishing 290430Z as L-hour for GSF insertion. CTF 76, while not privy to all of the secure voice communications, had received the various iterations of L-hour, none of which were interpreted to require GSF redistribution since they did not establish an L-hour, per se, for helicopter operations. Having clearly established L-hour as the time of arrival at the helicopter LZs in the plan and in pre-execute dialogue between the fleet and USSAG/7AF, both CTF 76 and CTG 79.1 considered the subordination of the helicopter L-hour to that for TACAIR to be, in effect, a redefinition of the term. CTF 76 had, however, upon

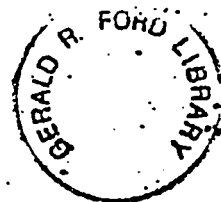


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receipt of the Option IV execute order, begun preparatory actions short of helicopter transfers. At 0350Z when CTF 76 received the CINCPACFLT 0430Z L-hour message, he directed immediate initiation of GSF redistribution, but recognized that 0430Z at the LZs could not be met. Accordingly, he advised COMUSSAG/7AF by message that 0500Z was the earliest LZ time possible and that, unless directed otherwise, he would so execute. CTF 76 subsequently determined he could not meet 0500Z and changed L-hour to 0700Z, with the first GSF being inserted at 0700Z.

c. (S) Summary. Uncertainty over the GSF helicopter cross-decking status on the part of COMUSSAG/7AF and the use of L-hour references for activity other than GSF arrival time at the LZs resulted in delays and confusion in the establishment of L-hour for helicopter operations. In addition to these difficulties, lack of knowledge of the cross-decking requirement at the higher levels, and the lack of current status information in the Hawaii command centers, precipitated a series of questions over the command conference net concerning the whereabouts of the helicopters before their departure for the LZs was possible. Since JCS and other headquarters were not addressees on the messages and/or plans defining the L-hour alert and explaining the GSF cross-decking requirement, it was expected that helicopters would arrive at the LZs within one and one-half hours after the execute order. An explanation of the built-in delays was not provided by any agency on the secure conference net.

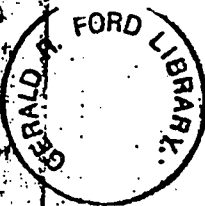


7. (S) Military/Embassy Relationships.

a. (C). Prior to Execution of NEMVAC Operations. Prior to execution of NEMVAC operations there were only two military units in RVN. The principal unit was the Defense Attache Office (DAO) commanded by the Defense Attache (DATT), MG Homer Smith. The DATT, as a member of the US Mission to RVN, was under the direction of the US Ambassador. Through military channels he reported to COMUSMACV, thence to CINCPAC and JCS. The other military unit was the US Delegation, Four Party Joint Military Team (USDEL FPJMT) commanded by Colonel John H. Madison, Jr., which was under the operational control of the Political/Military Unit, AMEMB, but attached to DAO for support. Some time prior to the execution of Option IV, Operation FREQUENT WIND, the DATT had been appointed as the US Mission Coordinator for Emergency Evacuation, and had organized an Emergency Evacuation Center (EEC) in the DAO compound drawing on the resources of both the DAO and the USDEL FPJMT. The EEC was the focal point for evacuation for the entire US Mission and processed thousands of personnel for evacuation by fixed-wing aircraft. The EEC was augmented by air movement specialists and representatives from the USMC GSF. Immediately prior to the execution of NEMVAC operations, the USDEL FPJMT had been detached from the DAO and ordered to report to the Political/Military Unit at the AMEMB compound.

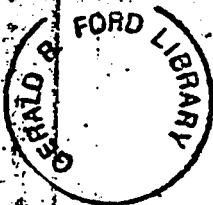
b. (S) Execution of NEMVAC Operations.

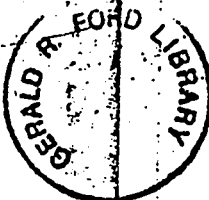
(1) DAO Compound. The transition from fixed-wing evacuation to helicopter evacuation was accomplished with minimum adjustment. The existing EEC and the airlift processing centers assisted in organizing and marshaling the evacuees under the command of the GSF Commander.



CTG 79.1. The transfer of command and responsibility from the DATT to CTG 79.1 was in accordance with the plan. Prior reconnaissance and liaison by members of CTG 79.1 facilitated this transfer of responsibility and resulted in an efficient operation.

(2) Embassy Compound. It was envisioned that the Ambassador and his staff would be evacuated through the DAO Evacuation Site, therefore no plans were made by the GSF to take charge of the Embassy evacuation. The initial evacuation of the Embassy (primarily Embassy staff members) was by Air America helicopters to the DAO Evacuation Site. When it was ascertained that the over 2,000 people crowded into the Embassy compound could not be moved to the DAO Evacuation Site as planned, alternative arrangements were made. Major Kean, USMC Embassy Security Guard began to organize an LZ in the Embassy Parking Lot. Colonel Madison volunteered the services of the USDEL FPJMT (3 officers, 3 NCOs) to assist in marshaling evacuees. Both Colonel Madison and Major Kean were still part of the AMEMB staff and the Embassy evacuation remained under the control of the Embassy (primarily the Deputy Chief of Mission, Mr. Wolfgang Lehman), and was not passed to CTG 79.1. No senior member of the GSF was sent to assume control of the Embassy for CTG 79.1. Command and control and communications remained ambiguous. Reporting on the situation at the Embassy to the EEC at the DAO was made by various individuals within the Embassy. This lack of clear-cut command and control arrangements caused misunderstandings and confusion regarding the evacuation of the Embassy.





1. (a) Tactical Control and Monitoring. As has been discussed
in preceding paragraphs, there were no significant problems
encountered in the preparation and marshaling of forces in the
operating area and the control and monitoring procedures atten-
dant to these early phases are subsumed in that assessment.
Similarly, all air support, including TACAIR, was flown
generally as planned, requiring no procedural deviations in
control or monitoring concepts prescribed in the plan. Once
the L-hour issue for GSF insertion was resolved, control of
the initial helicopter operations (specifically, the first
three waves) functioned as planned accomplishing the ex-
traction of 5,567 persons from the DAO compound with 96 helo
sorties flown in 5 hours and 41 minutes. It was in the unplanned
expanded operation out of the Embassy compound that a control
problem developed. While preparations at the Embassy included
modification of the parking lot to permit H-53 operations, the
plan called for the evacuation of less than 100 people from the
Embassy roof with Air America helos, or with CH-46s as a last
resort. The ad hoc nature of this phase, combined with the
lack of firm numbers of evacuees to be extracted from the
Embassy, resulted in some H-53 helicopters being held on deck
or in an airborne holding pattern at their parent ships when
they could have been integrated into the daisy-chain pattern
to the Embassy. This temporary breakdown in control was not
only a function of faulty or uncertain evacuee information and
unanticipated Embassy evacuation operations, but it was also
influenced by concern for aircraft maintenance, crew rest
(one pilot spent 22-1/2 hours at the controls), night and
weather complications and the hostile environment. It is
considered that these factors in aggregate distracted key
individuals from the pressing requirement to immediately

adjust helicopter control procedures so as to maximize the lift effort at the Embassy. This was critical since the helicopter forces were nearly three times greater than a force normally controlled by a single Helicopter Direction Center (HDC).

9. (S) Reporting Procedures. The various FREQUENT WIND Option IV

plans of COMUSMACV/7AF and supporting commands contained provisions for detailed reporting to higher authority. These provisions included ample guidance on frequency and type of SITREPs,

OPREPs, and the collection of reports from all involved units.

Voice reports on the number of evacuees in each lifting helicopter were specifically required, as were spot reports identifying numbers and categories of evacuated personnel. Once

execution was directed, the secure voice conference net tended to supplant the message reports specified. Consequently,

several commands ceased transmission of such reports, although

key SPOTREPs/SITREPs were retransmitted by subordinate commands

to higher authority. CINCPAC filed a series of situation

reports to the JCS which contained operational/evacuee information

gleaned from all sources of information available.

10. (S) Rules of Engagement and Operating Authorities. The ROE

and operating authorities provided by higher headquarters and

the USSAG/7AF OPLAN were considered by all participating units

and organizations as adequate and thorough, and no significant

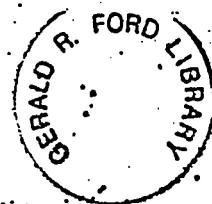
problem areas or issues developed during the evacuation operation.

Prior to execution, however, several issues were surfaced

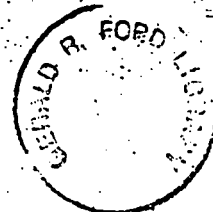
which required resolution. The issues concerned the use of Riot

Control Agents (RCA), the employment of WILD WEASEL assets

against threat radars, and authorities against KOMAR vessels.



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Each of these issues was resolved satisfactorily prior to execution, either by the granting of additional authorities not previously granted, by the issuance of additional guidance, or by interpretation or amplification of existing EOR or authorities.



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